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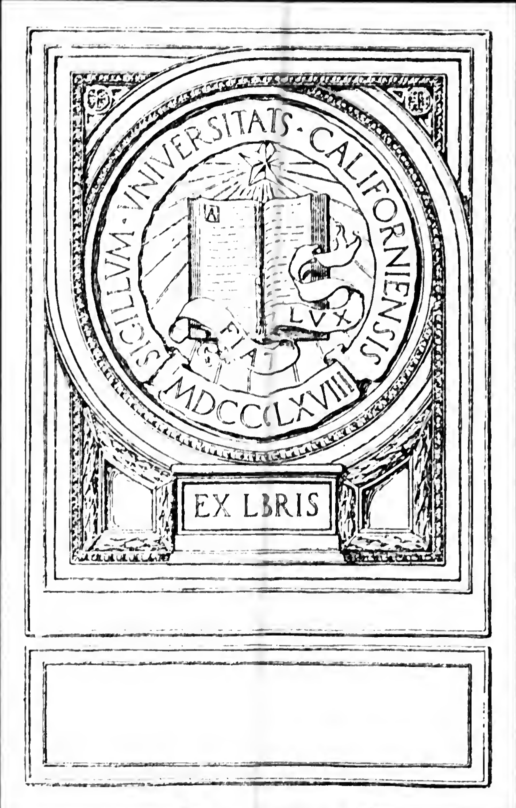
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DECISIVE EPISODES IN WESTERN HISTORY

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED AT IOWA CITY IOWA BEFORE THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA ON FEBRUARY TWENTY-FIRST NINETEEN HUNDRED FOURTEEN

BY
LAENAS G. WELD

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DECISIVE EPISODES IN WESTERN HISTORY

As you travel along some highway, turning aside to avoid this pitfall or that rock or some snag in your way, always watching your next footstep and taking only casual note of the trees, the buildings, or even the fields, groves, and hills as you pass them, it may suddenly occur to you to look back and see how far you have come and what the way is like. When behold! There is spread out before you a landscape beautiful, always beautiful — for mere perspective is pleasing, regardless of its content. You see now the relation and extent of the groves and meadows and uplands passed, the quiltlike pattern of the fields, and the road itself along which you have traveled. But the pitfall, the rock, the snag which threatened to trip you, also the flowers which you plucked and threw aside, the spring at which you refreshed yourself — these details have disappeared, obscured by larger features of

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which you took no note in passing. It was a very ordinary country as you journeyed through it; but now, as you look back upon it, the view affords a prospect of singular interest and you only wish that the haze in which the landscape has become enveloped would lift a bit that you might see a little more clearly.

And like unto this is History. In it we see the perspective of once current events and relations, which have drifted into the past, where all minor and merely personal incidents are obliterated; and over which tradition, in its quality of mercy, spreads the haze which softens down the hard lines and blends the inharmonious tints that ever mar the present.

When the development of our Middle West shall, with the lapse of time, have assumed the proper perspective it will afford one of the most marvelous and thrilling chapters in history. We who are familiar with only its later and more complex phases have seen enacted a drama bolder than playwright has ever dared to conceive. The kinetoscopic process by which a wilderness has been transformed into a garden, an organized society evolved from the most heterogeneous ele-

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ments, a liberty-loving yet law-abiding people assembled out of the fugitives from European tyranny and oppression — this has no parallel in the annals of human progress.

In the later phases of this development the railway has been the pioneer. After feeling its way along the most fertile valleys and across the fairest stretches of prairie from one commercial vantage point to another, the railroad took up the task of transporting, not only the populations of whole districts, but also the very buildings for their habitation; not only the materials and implements of agriculture, but also the products of agriculture and the proceeds yielded by these products in the eastern markets; took up the task, in fact, of earning the money to pay its dividends, to redeem its bonds, to improve its roadbed and equipment and to carry its operations into new fields and push still farther west the borders of up-to-date civilization. Indeed, the study of the settlement of the West — beyond the Mississippi and, even more so, beyond the Missouri — is a study in transportation.

But this rapid development has been the sequel to three centuries of preparation. Of these cen-

turies the first two were, roughly speaking, devoted to the solution of the purely geographical problems presented by the great interior wilderness of North America; the third, to social and political establishment.

No event had ever before so disturbed the world's equilibrium as the discovery of America. As the extent and resources of the new continent gradually revealed themselves, the significance of the discovery became more and more apparent. Europeans were fairly staggered at the wider outlook upon the world afforded by the voyages of Columbus, Vasco da Gama and Magellan — at finding themselves in such new and unsuspected relations to the planet upon which they lived. As the round globe revealed itself, the ancient mythical boundaries betwixt the known and the unknown, with all their vague terrors, were swept away. To the peoples of Europe a vast field for adventurous exploitation was suddenly thrown open. The future no longer lay before them upon the same dead level as the past. It loomed up before them, presenting practical problems of a new sort, problems for the solution

of which they were little prepared, either by experience or by their natural proclivities.

Thus, while enthusiasm was high, progress was slow. Between Europe and the new continent lay a thousand leagues of ocean; the navigation of which, though it had lost its mythical terrors, was still attended by real dangers of a very substantial sort. The perilous passage made, the bold adventurers faced a continent for the most part inhospitable. Such welcome as they were occasionally accorded by the aboriginal inhabitants was easily, and usually, turned to sullen suspicion. It was before the days of canned provisions and the many collapsible and portable contrivances which to-day make of such expeditions, relatively at least, mere "outings".

In the South the Spaniard looted and destroyed two civilizations in his lust for gold and was lured through vast wildernesses in the vain search for yet other Eldoradoes. In the North the Frenchman scoured still vaster territories in his equally rapacious, though less demoniacal, quest for furs. In the middle land, between the sub-tropic heat and the sub-arctic cold, the sturdy

Englishman, while despising neither gold nor furs, grubbed a safer living from the soil.

Spain was soon shorn of her prestige; but her just and inevitable reward was long — too long — delayed. The record of her atrocities in the New World closed only as the waters of Havana Harbor closed over the *Maine*. Above the scenes enacted at Manila and at Santiago there may well have hovered the avenging angels of Montezuma and Atahualpa. But the career of Spain this side of the sea is of little concern to us, except that, through meddling with it, it has of late years bequeathed to us our full share of the "white man's burden" and "the big brother's responsibility".

Not so with the rival careers of France and of England in America. From that rivalry, as it deepened into struggle and from struggle into the death grip, was developed American independence. We are familiar with the story. As school boys we learned it and dwelt upon its incidents with patriotic pride. But there are many features of the story as ordinarily told which, from our western point of view, need emphasizing. Its perspective is quite different as we see

it from the shores of the Great Lakes or the banks of the Mississippi and as our cousins see it from the grand old State of Massachusetts.

At this juncture I may be pardoned perhaps for alluding, at least briefly, to my subject. What we mean by "Decisive Episodes" depends upon two things. First it depends upon our point of view, as I have already intimated. In any case the degree to which an incident may be regarded as *decisive* has no necessary relation to its magnitude. The decisive battles in the world's history have not been those in which the largest armies contended or in which the slaughter was the most amazing. They are the battles by which the whole subsequent course of history has been determined. Thus, had Harold beaten off the Norman invader at Hastings we should have been a quite different people from what we are to-day, speaking a different language, living under different laws, swayed by different ideals. Indeed, we should not have been. It was a decisive battle, that at Hastings.

Again our estimate of what is really decisive, as distinguished from that which is merely incidental, depends upon the extent to which we ad-

mit fatalism into our philosophy of events. If we believe — as the fatalist does in effect — that the whole trend of things material and things spiritual depends upon the values of the constants in the equation of continuity as applied to the primordial nebula, then nothing can be decisive or even significant; for all is foreordained. If History is to mean anything to us we must, with Pope, assume that the Creator,

> "[While] binding Nature fast in Fate,
> Left free the human will."

While the English were establishing themselves at Jamestown the French founded Quebec. At Jamestown was Captain John Smith; at Quebec was the equally purposeful Samuel Champlain. Each of these men is worthy to rank among the foremost of explorers. Each was in search of a passage through the American continent to the Pacific, little suspecting the vast stretches of forest and prairie, the desert wastes and the towering mountain ranges traversed by the overland route to that western sea.

Just now we are concerned with Champlain. Scarcely had he occupied the commanding site of Quebec, when he determined to explore the un-

known region to the south of the St. Lawrence. The military escort for such an enterprise could not be spared from the newly founded colony. Nothing daunted, however, Champlain accepted an invitation to join an Algonquin war party, which was setting out for a raid into the country of the Iroquois in northern New York, and soon became their military champion. While on this expedition he discovered the lake which bears his name. It had been better for New France, and for France herself, had Champlain achieved nothing more signal than this. His Indian escort, however, had little interest in mere geographical discovery. They were out for scalps.

Down at Jamestown the English colonists were loading a ship with "fool's gold", while Smith, disgusted at their folly, was continuing his search for the passage to the South Sea; and before that summer's leaves had fallen Henry Hudson was at the mouth of the Mohawk, scarce fifty miles from Lake Champlain, on the same quest.

Upon the west shore of the lake, at Ticonderoga, the enemy was encountered one evening in force. The invaders kept to their canoes all night, a bow-shot off shore, while the Iroquois in-

trenched themselves behind a hastily constructed stockade. On the next day, the thirtieth of July, 1609, round this primitive defense, on the borders of that forest-girt lake never before visited by the white man, was waged one of the really decisive battles of American history. From a military standpoint it was an insignificant affair, engaging scarcely two hundred savage warriors and only three Europeans. Two or three muskets won the victory for the invaders — more by the terror which they inspired than by their execution. The blow delivered, the victors promptly fled the consequences of their rashness.

The haughty Iroquois never forgot this humiliation and from that time forward their hostility to France and her Indian allies was active and all but relentless. As soon as they had themselves obtained firearms from the Dutch traders on the Hudson they became formidable adversaries and effectually checked any subsequent attempts of the French to occupy the country to the south of the St. Lawrence. It was many years before Champlain and his successors fully realized the commanding position occupied by the Iroquois Confederacy (the Five Nations) in

northern New York. Their territory comprised the watershed from which numerous streams swept northward to the St. Lawrence or the Great Lakes; southward to the deep bays indenting the Atlantic seaboard; eastward to the tide waters of the Hudson; and westward to the Ohio and onward to that "great water" of the west, the Mississippi, which the vague geographical notions of the day persisted in confounding with the Pacific. From this vantage ground the Iroquois exacted obedience or became the devastating scourge of all the Indian tribes from the St. Lawrence to the Gulf Plains, from the Atlantic to the Mississippi. None of these might trade with the French, except at their peril.

The south being thus closed to him and the regions of the North being uninviting, Champlain's further explorations were directed toward the West. He followed the Ottawa River to its sources; which, barring a few portages, afford a continuous canoe route through Lake Nipissing to the Georgian Bay of Lake Huron. A sea lay before him; but its waters were fresh, so it was called the *Mer Douce.* That the great South Sea, the goal of his ambition, lay just beyond, he little

doubted; nor did his followers for two decades to come.[1]

Then Jean Nicolet, in wilderness-craft a disciple of Champlain, was commissioned to explore the lands and seas beyond Lake Huron, in the confident hope that he would be able to establish communication with the Asiatic Orient. As a result of his voyage Lake Superior and Lake Michigan became known. Nicolet also heard, from the Indians living on the Fox River above Lake Winnebago, in Wisconsin, of a "great water" which could be reached in three days by means of a short portage.

Again this "great water" was understood to be some arm of the South Sea. The portage was, of course, that from the Fox River to the Wisconsin, and it was over this route that the Mississippi was actually reached by Joliet and Marquette forty years later. During this interval, however, the northern Algonquin tribes allied to the French had been entirely broken up and

[1] A set of the *Works of Champlain*, in four volumes and in the French language, is to be found in the library of The State Historical Society of Iowa. Champlain's observations and descriptions are so full and accurate that one can with his journal and a good map follow the course of his explorations from day to day.

scattered by the revengeful and devastating Iroquois. Their dispirited remnants had fled to the remotest shores of the Great Lakes, and thither the French fur traders and Jesuit missionaries had followed. It was from these far northern waters that Joliet and Marquette, La Salle and Tonti, and those who came after them descended the Mississippi and occupied its basin.

Such was the far-reaching result of that little scrimmage on the beach of Lake Champlain, where the Iroquois first felt the maddening sting of the white man's bullet. Nor was this the end. The stage had only been set for a new scene. But let us pause to examine more closely the settings of this stage.

It was La Salle who conceived the scheme of a vast French empire in the Mississippi Valley. In 1669, four years before the famous voyage of Joliet and Marquette, he had left his estates on the St. Lawrence and journeyed off to the southwest. A temporary lull in the Iroquois hostilities had made this journey possible. Where he went and what he found will probably never be accurately known, though all the circumstances would indicate that he explored the country to the

south of Lake Erie and followed the Ohio River for a considerable distance.[2] It is certain that he did not reach the South Sea and that neither he nor others of the French entertained any further projects with reference to that chimera. His subsequent career can only be explained upon the assumption that, either by his own explorations, or through the reliable testimony of Indians whom he met, he had resolved the mystery of the "Great Water of the West". The Joliet-Marquette voyage but confirmed what he already understood. He was thus early planning to establish a chain of military and trading posts, sweeping in a vast arch from the St. Lawrence round the Great Lakes and down the Mississippi. Canada, a barren, inhospitable land, ice-bound during half the year, was the only outlet to this wilderness empire. He would establish another through the mouth of the Great River, whose lower course could as yet only be conjectured; he would found another New France in

[2] Margry's *Découvertes et Etablissements des Francais dans l'Ouest et dans le Sud l'Amerique Septentrionale* contain all that is ever likely to be known about this voyage, together with much discussion. A complete set of these documents, in seven volumes, is to be found in the library of The State Historical Society of Iowa.

these lower latitudes and under sunnier skies. By means of these two complementary colonies and the long line of communication to be maintained between them, the Indian tribes to the north and west were to be shielded against further incursions of the Iroquois, thus insuring a lucrative and continuous fur trade. The Spaniards were to be held in check in the South; and the dominion of France secured throughout the whole interior of North America. The English were to be confined between the mountains and the sea, their coastwise colonies being but a string to this long French bow.

No sooner was this bold enterprise understood than La Salle was "marked up" for misfortune. The Canadian fur trader foresaw his annual harvest diverted to other commercial highways; the Jesuit was alarmed at the prospect of losing his prestige as rival interests and motives became dominant; the *coureurs de bois*, those wild forest rangers whom the fur trade had brought into evidence throughout the whole valley, regarded the proposed chain of military posts as a menace to their lawless freedom. With these elements arrayed against him, La Salle was pursued to his

ruin by jealousy, then to his death by malice. But while his unburied bones lay whitening upon the prairie in southwestern Louisiana, New Orleans was founded and flourished. It not only flourished in a substantial way; but, under the stimulating influence of John Law, the financier of the "Mississippi Bubble", it "boomed". When the bubble burst there were stranded in the country many of its victims, noble and otherwise, who had no means of leaving and who must perforce devote themselves to making an honest living. The indigo plant was introduced; also the sugar cane. Slaves were imported, and the life of the typical southern planter of antebellum days was fairly inaugurated. Forts, too, were built along the long line projected by La Salle from Canada to Louisiana. The water route from the St. Lawrence to the Gulf of Mexico by way of the portages at the head of Lake Michigan was constantly traversed by fur traders, prospectors, colonists, and even tourists.

The eighteenth century had been "rung in"; but during its first half there was little significant change in the Great Valley. In 1721 came Charlevoix on a tour of inspection — to visit the

Jesuit missions throughout New France. He must have had an interesting time of it, for he has left an interesting account of what he saw.[3] From this and many other sources we can form a pretty good idea of what life was like among the French *habitans* here in the Mississippi Valley in those early days.

Anyone who has journeyed by steamboat down the Mississippi may have noticed that the west bank of the river rises for the most part abruptly in high bluffs; while to the east the country stretches away to a distance of from two to ten miles in broad level river bottoms. This singular phenomenon is the result of the rotation of the earth upon its axis. The same force that deflects the trade winds to the west deflects the southward flowing waters of the river toward the western margin of its flood plain. One of the beautiful alluvial tracts thus left upon the eastern bank, and extending for a distance of seventy or eighty miles below the mouth of the Missouri, was long known as the American Bottom.

Just prior to the opening of the eighteenth

[3] Charlevoix's *History and General Description of New France* is to be found in the library of The State Historical Society of Iowa.

century the Kaskaskias, the Cahokias, and the Tamaroas had established themselves here. The many conspicuous mounds and the abundant flint implements still to be found in this region indicate that from prehistoric times it was the favorite abode of aboriginal populations. Here, too, came the French, in pursuance of the policy foreshadowed by La Salle, to establish in this central region a colony which should serve as a granary for the whole West. The extension of the fur trade up the Missouri River and the development of the lead mines of the Meramec, just across the Mississippi, determined in a general way the location of this first of agricultural communities in the Middle West. The colonists laid out long narrow farms and appropriated ample cattle ranges. They planted orchards and vineyards. Kaskaskia, Prairie du Rocher, and Cahokia became thriving villages. There were churches and wine shops, breweries (at least one) and blacksmith shops, warehouses, and markets. The busy *habitans* tilled the soil and tended their cattle, horses, and sheep; some built flat boats and wagons. They burned brick and earthenware; tanned leather and wove both sheep and

buffalo wool into coarse cloth. They cured furs; made soap and candles and cheese; refined lead and zinc; ground flour by water mill and wind mill; brewed and baked and churned; attended mass; carried on an active river commerce; fraternized with the Indians and taught them the arts of peace. All this a thousand miles inland — back in the heart of the American wilderness — before the English had advanced beyond the ebb and flow of the Atlantic tides.

A quaint and gay people were these pre-pioneers of the Mississippi Valley. They were sociable creatures, and social lines were not sharply drawn among them. Parties were an almost nightly affair, with dancing on the rough puncheon floor to the music of the ubiquitous French fiddle. Indian maids with French *coureurs de bois* and canoemen, French girls with young Indian chiefs and even the sable sons and daughters of Ham — all bounced through the movements of the *quadrille* together, all "trigged up" in gaudy fineries of silk and fur, beads and buckskin, plumes and war paint. Acadia has its Evangeline, and we remember reading "Alice of Old Vincennes". Kaskaskia is equally entitled

to a literary heroine, and the materials for her creation are abundant.

For the protection of these growing colonies and their Indian allies there was built Fort Chartres — no rude stockade, like those already defending the route from Quebec to New Orleans, but a solid structure of stone and mortar, estimated to have cost $1,500,000. It was provided with commodious barracks; a deep, dark dungeon-keep that was never used; and heavy ordnance that fired only salutes to the wilderness. It was garrisoned by regular troops, fully officered and properly uniformed, who affected, here in this remote corner of the world, something of the frivolities of the French capital.

If we give credit to the descriptions of Charlevoix the aborigines here made a nearer approach to civilization than they have ever attained under the presumably enlightened Indian policy of our own government. The work of the Jesuit missionaries is cordially extolled. From the first to last they strenuously opposed the sale of liquor to the Indians and thus did much to check the physical and moral degeneracy which has been,

elsewhere, the invariable result of contact with the white race.

Under this mild régime, travel in the country to the west of the Wabash was at this period — so claims Charlevoix — as safe as along the highways of France. This may have been true in 1721, the year that he descended the Mississippi; but there were many years during the eighteenth century when it was more than expedient to beware of the incursions of the Fox and Kickapoo tribes dwelling to the west of Lake Michigan. In fact the Fox-Wisconsin portage was but occasionally used. Even the old route of La Salle by way of the St. Joseph, Kankakee, and Illinois rivers had fallen into disuse. The situation about the Great Lakes at this period has been very carefully investigated by Dr. Quaife, one of our honored guests this evening, and is most interestingly described in his recent work on *Chicago and the Old Northwest.* A new route was gradually opened to and from Canada, shorter than those by way of the Lake Michigan portages. This was the route by the portage from the Maumee into the Wabash. The canoe of the *voyageur*

glided from the western extremity of Lake Erie into the Maumee where the city of Toledo now stands. Up this river, upon the site of Fort Wayne, Indiana, was Fort Miami; where the same *voyageur* dragged his canoe from the water to make the portage to the Wabash. The forest road along which he toiled determined, at a later date, the course of the Wabash and Erie Canal. It conducted him to Fort Ouatinon, situated just below the rapids and at the head of practical canoe navigation of the Wabash. Once more afloat the way was clear of obstruction to the mouth of the Mississippi. Vincennes had already been established further down the Wabash by a company conducted thither by one Father Mermet in 1727. We shall have occasion to refer again to this, the oldest city in the Ohio Valley. Detroit, founded in the first year of the eighteenth century, was the strategic key to all of these early westward routes.

This chain of forts and settlements extending from the head of Lake Erie to the Ohio formed an impassable barrier to the Iroquois in their devastating raids and thus insured the safety of both the French and their Indian allies in the

farther West. It also served to check the advance of English wood rangers to the Mississippi, and thus secured a complete monopoly of the fur trade along its western tributaries — the Missouri, the Des Moines, the Iowa, and other rivers.

So far, all was favorable to France. She had secured the two main entrances to the interior basin of North America, the one by way of the St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes, the other by the mouths of the Mississippi. But there was a third route — that by way of the mountain passes of the Appalachian system — the importance of which the French failed to appreciate until it was too late. These valleys conduct to the headwaters of the Ohio, which in their westerly course cut the long line of communication between Canada and Louisiana at its weakest point.

In the early decades of the eighteenth century English traders began to find their way into the valley of the Alleghany from Pennsylvania and into that of the Monongahela from Virginia. Both Pennsylvania and Virginia claimed the territory involved and there soon developed a

sharp competition which led to bold advances to the west along the Ohio and up its principal northern branches. Before the middle of the century they were carrying their wares to the headwaters of the Muskingum, the Scioto, and the Miami. Here they began to encounter the French who had established their stations at the headwaters of the streams flowing northward into Lake Erie. Hitherto these latter had been able to draw to themselves the trade from the Ohio over the watershed separating its basin from that of the lake, without actually occupying the region.

In other quarters, too, the English were equally aggressive. The traders from Virginia and the Carolinas, pushing their canoes up Broad River, easily passed through a defile of the Blue Ridge to the sources of the Tennessee. Others found their way through Cumberland Gap to the upper reaches of the Cumberland. Thus was the territory comprising the States of Kentucky and Tennessee over-run by English traders and settlers, who lost no opportunity to induce the warlike Chickasaws to harass the river commerce of the French, compelling them to furnish their

fleets of canoes and barges with military escort in order to insure safe passage to and from New Orleans. There is a detailed record of at least one strong expedition sent from Fort Chartres against these allies of the English, which, failing to coöperate with an auxiliary force from New Orleans, was destroyed almost to a man. Such was the setting of the stage when, in the middle of the eighteenth century, the curtain rose for another act in the drama of Western History.

The French had now been stirred to activity. The Governor of Canada, in the summer of 1749, sent Celoron de Bienville to reaffirm the French sovereignty over the Ohio Valley, long claimed on the ground of its exploration by La Salle. The expedition proceeded to the Alleghany by way of Niagara and Lake Chautauqua. Here possession of the country round about was taken in the old pompous feudal manner by burying an inscribed leaden plate with great solemnity at the foot of a tree. Other plates were buried at conspicuous points — seven in all. Some of these plates have been recovered. The one found at Pittsburgh is still legible. It reads (with omis-

sions): "In the year 1749 in the reign of Louis XV King of France, Celoron, commandant of New France, has buried this plate at the Three Rivers this third of August, near the river Oyo, otherwise the Fair River, as a monument to the possession that we have taken of the said river Oyo and of all those that fall into it and of all lands on both sides to the sources of said rivers, as the preceding kings of France have enjoyed or ought to have enjoyed it." By such shallow ceremonies did France attempt to warn off the stubborn English. Had each of Celoron's leaden tablets, like the dragon's teeth of classic myth, sprung into a fortress the territory must yet have passed to the Anglo-Saxon.

While the French leader was thus tramping and trumpeting through the forests of Ohio, proclaiming his dog-in-the-manger doctrine, a number of influential Virginians, quite unconscious of his proceedings, were busy with the organization of the Ohio Company. The purpose was to anticipate the occupation of the district included in their grant by settlers from the rival Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, rather than by the French. The Washingtons were well repre-

sented among those interested in the company. Large quantities of goods for the Indian trade were imported from London, numerous settlers were engaged, trading posts were established at advantageous points, and a fort planned at the forks of the Ohio (Pittsburgh).

Despite the secrecy with which the company guarded their movements the French soon learned of the enterprise through the Indians and proceeded to checkmate it. At Presque Isle, on Lake Erie, a fort was erected to serve as a military base. At the end of the portage road opened to the headwaters of French Creek, a tributary of the Alleghany, Fort Le Boeuf was established. The line was to be completed by the building of Fort Venango at the mouth of French Creek; but, winter being at hand, the site was temporarily secured by seizing the block-house of one John Frazer, located near by, and quartering a garrison there.

The Virginians were amazed when news of these energetic measures was brought to them by the evicted Frazer; but, the French might still be kept from the Ohio by building a fort at the confluence of the Alleghany and the Monongа-

hela. It was now mid-winter, however, and this could not be undertaken at once. A messenger was therefore dispatched to demand of the French an explanation of their designs. The person selected for this delicate and perilous mission was George Washington. This was in the winter of 1753-4, while he was still in his twenty-first year. Washington met the French commandant, Legardeur de Saint Pierre, at Fort Le Boeuf. Here is what he records of their interview in his journal:

> He invited me to sup with them, and treated me with the greatest complaisance. The wine, as they dosed themselves pretty plentifully with it, soon banished the restraint which at first appeared in their conversation, and gave license to their tongues to reveal their sentiment more freely. They told me that it was their absolute design to take possession of the Ohio, and by G—d they would do it; for that, although they were sensible the English could raise two men for their one, yet they knew their motions were too slow and dilatory to prevent any undertaking of theirs. They pretended to have an undoubted right to the river from a discovery made by one La Salle, sixty years ago; and the rise of this expedition is, to prevent our settling on the river or waters of it, as they had heard of some families moving out in order thereto.

The rapid succession of manoeuvres which took place during the following spring, which resulted

in the military occupation of the forks of the Ohio by the French, followed by their advance up the Monongahela Valley and their defeat by Washington in the sharp engagement at Great Meadows — all this is duly recorded in our text-books of history.

It is a noteworthy fact that in the first battle of that eventful war which gave America to the English, Washington was in immediate command and the first gun was fired by his order. As we celebrate his birthday tomorrow let us remember that long before he became a conspicuous figure upon the national stage he rendered faithful service in connection with one of the most decisive episodes in Western History.

The words of Thackeray, quoted from "The Virginians", are peculiarly appropriate tonight: "It is strange", he says, "that in a savage forest of Pennsylvania a young Virginian officer should fire a shot and waken up a war which was to last for sixty years, which was to cover his own country and pass into Europe, to cost France her American colonies and create the great Western Republic, to rage over the Old World after it was extinguished in the New, and of all the myriads

engaged in the vast contest to leave the prize of the greatest fame with him who struck the first blow" — George Washington.

The French and Indian War constitutes a decisive episode in our history, not only because it secured the dominion of the Western Hemisphere to the English people, but for the further reason that it united the English colonies into a federation founded upon common interest. The picture inserted by Franklin in the "Pennsylvania Gazette", of the disjointed serpent with the legend, "Join or die", and afterward the pattern for a colonial flag, was a graphic epitome of the situation. But, though the colonies, federated in spite of their mutual jealousies and dissensions, had fought the war to a complete victory and thus won for England a domain fairer than any nation ever before possessed, it soon became evident that they themselves were to be denied the fruits of that victory — were, in fact, to be merely exploited for the enrichment of British merchants and manufacturers and the fattening of British officials. An edict of his most royal majesty, George the Third, forbade settlers access to the Ohio Valley; and, indeed, the colonists might not

even trade in that region without royal permission. At the same time the stupid arrogance of Amherst, the officer in charge of the western posts, turned loose upon the frontier the horrors of Pontiac's War, without the least adequate defense against such a contingency having been provided. Stamp acts and writs of assistance and taxation without representation in general afforded the seaboard colonies sufficient ground for rebellion — all of which is duly specified in the Declaration of Independence. But the trans-mountaineers of the Ohio Basin had equally good reasons, not clearly set forth in that immortal document, for participating in the revolutionary struggle on their own account.

In the interval between the French and Indian War and the War for Independence the British took but little interest in the West. Garrisons were maintained at Niagara, at Detroit, and at Mackinac; but these were composed largely of French soldiers who had taken the oath of allegiance to England and enlisted as mercenaries. At the remoter posts the only tangible evidence of the change was displayed from the flag staff, upon which the Lions of St. George had displaced

the *Fleur de Lis.* French officers in English uniforms remained in command of shiftless Creole soldiers that knew no word of English. Fort Chartres had been abandoned and was already being undermined by the waters of the Mississippi. The cession to Spain of Louisiana, including the whole country to the west of the Mississippi, had permitted this lax discipline along what must otherwise have been a contested frontier.

At the outbreak of the Revolution the British post at Detroit was in charge of Lieutenant Governor Henry Hamilton. It was not the policy of the British to withdraw troops from the East to protect their western posts when the Indians could be easily enlisted in that service. By promise of substantial reward Hamilton secured the alliance of the Sioux, the Chippewas, and the Menominees from the Northwest; the Sauks and Foxes, the Winnebagoes, and the Potawatomis from the country between the Mississippi and Lake Michigan. These allies he turned loose upon the Kentucky settlements beyond the Ohio, people of his own flesh and blood; while the settlers to the north of that river, being still for the most part French, were as far as possible spared.

Those warriors who brought back to Detroit the greatest number of scalps were most handsomely rewarded. It is little wonder that Hamilton became known to the frontiersmen as "the hair-buying general".

The Kentucky settlers thus attacked were mostly Virginians by birth and naturally turned to that Commonwealth for assistance. Among those who had most staunchly defended the Ohio frontier and covered the retreat of the less resolute settlers to their old homes across the Alleghanies was George Rogers Clark. He was from a good old Virginia family, had early become a backwoods surveyor — like Washington — and was a man to win the respect and confidence of those bold pioneers with whom he had cast his lot. In his many excursions into the country bordering upon the Ohio he had learned much of the state of affairs among the French villages, now nominally under British control. What he knew, and what he learned from woodsmen whom he sent to make further observations, convinced him that the time was ripe for carrying the war into the enemy's country.

With this purpose in mind Clark set out for

Virginia to confer with Governor Patrick Henry. His project found instant favor with that sturdy old patriot and he was given every possible aid toward its execution. The jealousy of Pennsylvania, which was still acute, rendered it necessary to proceed *sub rosa.* Two letters of instruction were therefore issued by the astute Henry— one directly to the purpose, for Clark's own guidance, the other for "public consumption". These two letters, placed side by side as they lie before me, make interesting reading. Clark's ultimate object was the capture of Detroit. Before this could be undertaken, however, the British posts to the north of the Ohio and along the Mississippi must be seized and, if possible, their Creole garrisons won over to the American cause.

It would take a volume to describe adequately the campaign in which this was accomplished and I shall not attempt it here. Those of you who have read Mr. John Carl Parish's account of the enterprises of La Salle and Tonti, in *The Man with the Iron Hand*, will be glad to know that he contemplates the preparation of a volume on the campaign of George Rogers Clark for the same

series of *True Tales of the Great Valley*, edited by the Superintendent of this Society.

We can not tell in detail how, with his little troop of buckskin-clad and coon-skin-capped riflemen, Clark descended the Ohio to Fort Massac, a fort near its mouth established by the French as they withdrew from Fort Duquesne; how they stole across "Little Egypt" to Kaskaskia, surprised and took possession of that village without striking a blow, won over the population of the whole American Bottom to the cause of the Republic, and recruited from this population men to take the place of those whose enthusiasm and term of enlistment had expired simultaneously; how he marched thence to Vincennes in mid-winter — in the month of February it was, in the year 1779 — marched for twelve days through the "drowned lands" of the Wabash, over miles of country three feet under water, upon which the ice must needs be broken with their rifle butts as they advanced; how, meantime, the "hair-buying general" with a British garrison had advanced from Detroit and taken possession of Vincennes; how Clark's soldiers,

famished and desperate as wolves, compelled the surrender of the "hair-buyer", who even then had Indian war parties out hunting American scalps; nor how he finally "packed" his prisoners off to Virginia while he organized his conquest for further defense, and offense as well. The annals of war record the details of no campaign more remarkable than this. In a private letter to Governor Mason, Patrick Henry's successor, Clark begs him not to give out the details of their experiences, as those ignorant of the conditions which they encountered would disbelieve his statements.

The Revolution dragged wearily on to its end with no further incident of note in the West. The projected expedition against Detroit never materialized, much to Clark's disappointment; but it mattered not. The Governor of that post and a large part of its garrison had been captured at Vincennes. When hostilities had ceased and when, before the peace commissioners assembled in Paris, Benjamin Franklin contended for the American possession of the West, his arguments were powerfully reinforced by the fact that American supremacy was already assured in that

region and that no peace could be permanent without its recognition. All this we owe to George Rogers Clark. The capture of Vincennes had in the West an effect, both actual and moral, similar to that produced in the East by the surrender of Burgoyne at Saratoga. His campaign is surely entitled to rank as one of the really decisive episodes in Western History, and his title to a place in the American "hall of fame" is beyond dispute.

And now the great clock by which historians mark the lapse of time tolls *nineteen.* The young republic is making substantial progress, but with halting steps. Its affairs are still involved in the maze of European politics. France is again in possession of Louisiana and even cherishes the hope of recovering all that she had lost this side the sea through Bourbon incompetency. But the conciliatory policy adopted by Napoleon with reference to the United States forestalled any attempt to realize the hope. Jealous lest England should at last secure the prize, the value of which was now apparent to far-sighted men, Louisiana was "knocked down" to the United States at the bargain price of $15,000,000. New

England statesmen, of course, opposed the "deal"; but Thomas Jefferson, the "author of the Declaration of Independence, and of the Statute of Religious Liberty, and founder of the University of Virginia", carried his point and Uncle Sam took possession of an unimproved ranch equal in extent to all western Europe. Again was the responsible leader in one of the most decisive episodes of Western History a Virginian.

News traveled but slowly, by sailing ship and canoe, in the early days of the nineteenth century and it was the ninth of March, 1804, before the Spanish grandees at St. Louis hauled down their flag and, midst the huzzas of the Creole population, courteously hoisted the tri-color of France. The very next day this was lowered to make way for the stars and stripes — there were but seventeen stars then — and the people of the great West never since have been called upon to change their allegiance. Just across the river from St. Louis was a strange busy camp. Here were assembled, awaiting the formal transfer of Louisiana, the little party of soldiers, *voyageurs*, and frontiersmen, forty-two in all, under the joint

command of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, who were to carry this same flag to the far sources of the Missouri, then down the western mountain slopes to the Columbia and along that stream — "the Oregon, which hears no sound, save his own dashings" — to the Pacific.

I shall not detain you with the details of this expedition. There are several here this evening who will recall the most interesting account of it given by Mr. Rich, one of the Curators of this Society, at a meeting of the Political Science Club several years ago. Council Bluffs and Floyd's Bluff will suggest incidents of the earlier stage of its progress familiar to us as Iowans.

Two and one-half years passed by with no tidings from the explorers. They had been given up as lost; when on the twenty-third of September, 1806, thirty ragged, bronzed, and weather-beaten *voyageurs* steered their canoes up to the water front of St. Louis. People were surprised; but presently someone recognized who they were and cheers gave evidence of their welcome. These were the last of the great pathfinders of the American continent.

To the enterprise of Virginians we owe, not

only the consummation of the Louisiana Purchase itself, but also the "follow up" movement initiated by the Lewis and Clark Expedition, which finally made us secure in its possession; for these men, too, were Virginians. Captain William Clark was, in fact, a younger brother of George Rogers Clark, and Meriwether Lewis had been President Jefferson's secretary.

The nineteenth century is studded with events significant in connection with the development of the West. The century itself is one vast episode, emerging from the level of preceding times like the basic plateau of some mountain range, and precluding a just appreciation of the relief in which its great events actually stand.

The time allowed me will not permit of further specification. But as I write these words there looms up in the shadow beyond my lamp the figure of a man — tall, angular, and uncouth; yet strong, and with an expression of kindliness and tenderness such as can be depicted upon the face of no man who has not suffered. I need not tell you what Abraham Lincoln did for America. He will continue to be known in history as the

savior of the nation which Washington founded, and we are proud that he came out of the West.

But let us, while paying due honors to those whose enterprise and foresight brought the West within the bounds of the American Republic, while treasuring the memory of those heroes who grappled here with the primordial wilderness, and while cultivating that provincialism which is necessary to a just and proper pride in our western institutions — let us, with all this, keep ever before us that ideal for which our Lincoln gave himself, even as a living sacrifice: "No East, no West; no South, no North; but one country".

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